The House We Built: Press Kit

At a glance

Logline. Five Black businessmen get three hours to accept an offer to leave the country they helped build. The only person in the room who knows what the deal is worth is the woman pouring their coffee.

Tagline. We built the house. Now they want us out.

Genre	Dark comedy, historical
Inspired by	President Lincoln's August 14, 1862 meeting with five free Black men from Washington, D.C.
Setting	A modern corporate office, with every word of dialogue from 1862
Format	Short film, 2.39:1, shot on the Blackmagic Pocket Cinema Camera 6K
Shot in	Charlotte, North Carolina, October 2026
Runtime	Short. The BRIC screening is an 8-minute first look.
Writers	Lex Kimbrough and Melat Ayalew
Director	Lex Kimbrough
Production	Braveboy Media, with support from BRIC and the National Endowment for the Arts
First screening	BRIC, Brooklyn. Wednesday, November 11, 2026. Doors 6:30 PM.

Synopsis

Short (50 words). In a glass-walled office under a portrait of Abraham Lincoln, five Black businessmen are offered land, money and a colony in Central America if they'll lead their people out of the country. They have three hours to say yes. Niecy, the woman serving coffee, has heard what the offer is really worth.

Long (150 words). Niecy keeps the coffee coming on the executive floor. Down in the bullpen, Wiley the mail boy has heard a rumor that the men upstairs plan to send people out of the country, and he doesn't want to go.

Upstairs, executives Smith and Pomeroy pitch five of the most prosperous Black men in the city on a colony in Chiriquí: coal, land, self-government and the full protection of the United States. Smith sets a clock on the table. Three hours.

The delegates argue. The deal starts to sound reasonable. Then Niecy, who isn't supposed to speak, starts asking questions. What if there's no coal? What if the Navy isn't coming?

Shot in a modern office with every line written in the language of 1862, The House We Built is a dark comedy about the most respectable eviction notice in American history, and about who gets to answer it.

The history behind the film

On August 14, 1862, Abraham Lincoln met with five free Black men from Washington, D.C. at the White House. It was the first time a sitting president received a Black delegation on a matter of public policy, and he used the meeting to ask them to leave.

The delegates were Edward M. Thomas, the chair and a messenger in the House of Representatives; John F. Cook Jr., a teacher; John T. Costin; Cornelius Clark; and Benjamin McCoy. They were chosen that same day at a meeting of the city's Black churches at Union Bethel. Historian Kate Masur notes that Thomas and Cook had both backed resolutions there that opposed the whole colonization plan.

Lincoln told them, "But for your race among us there could not be war," and that "it is better for us both, therefore, to be separated." He pitched a colony in Chiriquí, in present-day Panama, built on coal. Senator Samuel Pomeroy was put in charge of recruiting settlers. A few weeks later, Frederick Douglass tore into the speech in Douglass' Monthly.

The plan fell apart that fall. The film takes its liberties: Niecy is invented, the three-hour clock is invented, and Lincoln never appears. The real Lincoln told the men to take their time. The question the film asks is real: who gets told to leave the house they built?

Director's statement

The August 1862 meeting isn't part of the Lincoln story most of us grew up with. Five Black men walk into the White House, and the President uses the time to explain why they should leave. Then he tells them to take their time.

I couldn't stop laughing at how polite it all was. Then I couldn't stop thinking about it.

Melat and I wanted to write the room the way it probably felt: men in good suits, a generous offer, and a quiet assumption that the people being asked to go would say thank you. We moved it into a modern office because that room still exists. The language stays in 1862. Nobody in the film winks at the audience, and they don't have to.

Niecy is the one person we made up. She pours the coffee, hears everything and isn't supposed to talk. In history, people like her are usually in the background. I wanted the camera to treat her like she was the smartest person in the building, because she probably was.

This is a comedy because the meeting was absurd. It's dark because the absurdity had a body count. If people walk out laughing and then get quiet in the car, we did our job.

Lex Kimbrough

Bios

Lex Kimbrough, co-writer, director and director of photography. Lex is a filmmaker, designer and creative strategist based in North Carolina. He runs Braveboy Media, where he makes branded content, television pitch decks and cultural projects. He holds a BA from UNC Greensboro.

Melat Ayalew, co-writer, executive producer and Niecy. Melat is a writer and storyteller whose work explores power, identity, and the tension between ideals and reality. She has television and film writing credits at Fox Entertainment across scripted genres, and brings structural rigor and a contemporary comedic voice to the 1862 encounter.

Credits

Role	Name
Written by	Lex Kimbrough and Melat Ayalew
Directed by	Lex Kimbrough
Executive producers	Kuye Youngblood, Charlie Hoxie, Raynita Vaughn, Melat Ayalew, Lex Kimbrough
Production manager	Terrance Klein

Role	Name
Director of photography	Lex Kimbrough
Sound mixers	James M. Holmes, Sam Hall
Production assistant	Zach Ofsanik
Poster and design	Duvy Studio
Production company	Braveboy Media
Support	BRIC, National Endowment for the Arts
Location	Charlotte, North Carolina. Special thanks to Hector Gonzalez.

Starring Melat Ayalew, Quatis Tarkington, Cecil Mack Henry, Nassier Kelly, Seandale Jackson, Brandon Henderson, Tom A. Harrison, Hunter Thore, Sean Gunby and Bret Dang.

Music licensed through Artlist.

Images, contact and sources

Download the poster, key art, stills and behind-the-scenes photos here: The House We Built Promo Kit

- Poster, 2000x3000 and print resolution
- Landscape key art, 4K, with and without the title
- Six film stills, 4K
- Behind-the-scenes photos

Press contact. Lex Kimbrough, Braveboy Media. lex@braveboy.media

Sources for the history section

- Abraham Lincoln, "Address on Colonization to a Deputation of Colored Men," August 14, 1862 (American Presidency Project)
- Frederick Douglass, Douglass' Monthly, September 1862
- Kate Masur, "The African American Delegation to Abraham Lincoln," Civil War History

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